



Variety Thrives in Devils Lake Arts Opportunities

By Stacy Fiedler

Clearwater Communications

From dance and drama to music and painting, Devils Lake has arts activities for all ages and interests. And, its citizens work hard to share those activities with the region and state. But then, what else would you expect from a community that houses the state's oldest and longest running musical theater?

Fort Totten Little Theater is only open for two months each summer, but those months are full of activity, with the musical running 16 times during a four-week period. "It's a very busy time," says Bill Schuler, past director and set designer for the theater. "We practice the musical during the whole month of June and perform the whole month of July."

Located in Cavalry Square on the Spirit Lake Reservation, it has been home to musical theater since 1964, making it one year older than the well-known Medora Musical.

The theater has some interesting quirks. "To get on stage from the dressing room, actors go outside and climb down the fire escape," says Schuler. "This is particularly interesting during a lightening storm. We always hope for good weather!"

Arts Around the Town

The performing arts aren't limited to theater in the summer. Devils Lake hosts an ongoing concert series, has an active Elks Community Band, is home to two dance studios, and supports a community orchestra. "To have this great variety of performing arts in a community of 7,000 is quite an accomplishment, but Devils Lake has sustained many of these organizations for more than 25 years," says Karen Anderson, a resident of nearby Warwick who is a North Dakota Council on the Arts board member. The Devils Lake Community Orchestra has been performing for 26 years, the Elks Band was formed in 1959, and Miki's School of Dance has been in Devils Lake since 1979.

The Devils Lake Community Orchestra was founded in 1980 by Russel Pearson and Rick Neukom. "When we founded it we

wanted a community organization that enhanced the orchestra program at the high school," says Pearson. "Our primary purpose is still to enhance the high school string program and act as a booster club for the high school orchestra." Some 50 to 60 community members rehearse once a week and perform two concerts each year. "One great thing about the Devils Lake orchestra is that we don't have auditions. We welcome everyone," says Pearson.

In 1959 when the Elks Community Band was formed in Devils Lake, its members were all men. But, by the mid-'80s, the band was beginning to falter, so it voted to allow women to join. "There was a lot of dissent at first," says band member Dianne Gunderson. "Those who were originally against having women in the band have completely changed their minds, and the band is a great big, fun group."

Today the Elks band has 35 to 40 members, five who have been with the band since its inception in 1959, and it performs at community events like Memorial Day celebrations, parades and community picnics.

For the citizens of Devils Lake who prefer to dance to music rather than play it, there are two dance studios in the community.



One of the many art classes held at the Lake Region Heritage Center. Above, the Devils Lake Elks Community Band has been performing since 1959.

Just For Kix is a precision dance/drill team studio for kids ages 3 through 18 run by Erin Lacina. “I have about 285 students right now and the interest keeps growing,” says Lacina.

The other dance studio in Devils Lake, Miki’s School of Dance, and its non-profit counterpart, Heritage Arts Ballet, are run by local dance instructor Miki Noltmeier. She teaches jazz, tap and ballet to ages two through adult, and she choreographs her own dance routines.

Visual Arts On Display

In an effort to keep the old Devils Lake post office from being torn down in 1978, the building was put on the National Register of Historic Places. Shortly after it was listed, the building was purchased and turned into the Lake Region Heritage Center. A few years later, Jim Scheile, museum director and curator, became a member of the North Dakota Arts and Galleries Association and began collecting art for a Visual Arts Gallery at the Heritage Center. Today, the gallery hosts local art shows, traveling exhibits, classes, and an annual student art show. “We have a strong permanent collection and great traveling exhibits,” says Scheile. “For a town our size we have a great art gallery.”

Another venue for the visual arts in Devils Lake is on the campus of Lake Region State College (LRSC). The college’s ongoing project, Art on the Prairie, displays art throughout the hallways of the campus. The school is always expanding its collection. “So far some of our more famous works are Dali and O’Keefe prints, and we have several originals from local artists,” said LRSC spokeswoman Erin Wood.

Also at LRSC is the *Spirit of the Painted Pony* Project. Last November, local artist Monte Yellow Bird Sr., known in the art world as Black Pinto Horse, painted a commissioned five-and-a-half-foot tall fiberglass horse on the LRSC campus. The project was an opportunity to honor the art of the Native American people and bring the talent of a nationally renowned local artist to Devils Lake. Yellow Bird’s studio space at LRSC was open to the public to watch him paint in his expressionism style, using vibrant colors, gradient hues, and symbols of his Native American traditions.

Another nationally renowned local artist involved in the community is Kandace Moyer-Klemetsrud, who specializes in contemporary wildlife paintings and cubist impressionist political drawings. She also is active in Devils Lake teaching art to the developmentally disabled, and works with area schools to bring in other national artists to teach students about art.

One of the first true coffeehouses in North Dakota, The Liquid Bean, is proud to display local works of art along with its coffee selections. For 12 years, owners Paul and Dan Johnson and



Lake Region State College President Dr. Sharon Etemad, and Candesk Cikana (Little Hoop) Community College president Cindy Lindquist paint the first brush strokes on The Painted Pony.



Just For Kix “Mini Kix” dance team performs a routine.

Paul’s wife, Arika, have worked hard to make The Liquid Bean a good space for local art. Arika, a local photographer and artist, says The Bean is committed to displaying local fine art and hosts open houses for artists while their work is on display. “We have so many talented artists in our area,” says Arika. “I just wish they weren’t so modest. We’d love to have more people displaying their work.”

Reaching Area Students

The saturation of arts in Devils Lake also reaches into the schools. The school system offers multiple arts classes and brings in local and national artists to enhance its arts education. And, the local 4-H groups in Devils Lake host a Project Day every year that features classes taught by local artists. Brenda Langerud, Ramsey County extension agent, says the 4-H Project Day typically offers a variety of arts related classes from watercolor painting to ceramics. “In the past, 175 4-Hers from 10 counties were involved,” says Langerud. “It’s a great way to expose a large group of kids to the arts.”

For more information call:

Fort Totten Little Theater, 701-662-8880
Lake Region Heritage Center, 701-662-3701
The Liquid Bean, 701-662-1065
Just For Kix dance studio, 701-662-8502
Heritage Arts Ballet, 701-662-4375

The Lake Region Heritage Center and the Arts Council of the Lake Region receive institutional support funding through the North Dakota Council on the Arts. For more information about the North Dakota Council on the Arts and its programs that support communities across the state, call 701-328-7590, or visit its website at www.discovernd.com/arts.

